



One Task Every GM Or DOS Should Do Right Now To Increase Group Sales Revenues

By Doug Kennedy

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With group demand growth having leveled off or declined in most hotel markets, General Managers and Directors of Sales are looking for ways to capture more of the market share of the business that is still out there.

As I have explored many of my previous articles, the hotel sales environment has changed dramatically in recent years, yet hotel sales training and the related sales processes have not evolved fast enough at too many hotels.

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Invent the Future

We all know that an ever-increasing number of meeting planners inquire electronically by sending emails; others use electronic request-for-proposal tools such as Cvent, Starcite, CVB sponsored websites and lead management tools offered by hotel brands.

As a result, it is now more important than ever to stand out from the competition by sending personalized correspondence, by using descriptions that allure and entice instead of listing, and by expressing sincere interest in securing the business. Yet another way to stand-out is by responding promptly and follow-up tenaciously.

Most if not all the hotel sales directors and general managers that I speak with seem to know and understand these principles. Yet when I conduct my pre-training "hotel sales process audits" for a wide range of hotel clients, I find that responses are far too often tardy, generic, and essentially the same as the responses being sent by all the others. Likewise, I often find a lack of tenacious follow-up.

One of my training mantras is: "If you want to the same results as all of the other hotel salespeople get, just do the same things the other salespeople are doing." That will surely result in you getting your "Fair share" of the market.

Leaders who are truly committed to excellence at every step in the sales cycle know that the key to success is accountability. It is not just enough to have a team that understands the principles of sales excellence, or to have a top-notch lead tracking system; they must also live by those principles. As a leader, the most important part is auditing their systems periodically.

Being in the hotel sales mystery shopping business, I of course think it is important to know what is being said during telephone inquiries, which is the focus of most traditional sales mystery shopping.

Yet sales audits such as I offer prior to my sales trainings dig deeper, and such as I'm describing here, allow a leader instead investigate a) what is being seen by the decision makers (who often are not the ones who inquired) and b) when they are seeing it. If you have never conducted a sales audit before, here are some ideas.

After notifying the team, while sitting with each sales manager, have them randomly pull 10 or so inquiries, roughly representative of the various lead channels. (This can be done by searching their email folders for the notifications sent by various systems that a new lead is available, and for voice inquiries by checking the copies of completed voice lead inquiry forms located in a master file somewhere in sales.)

Next, sit with each salesperson and ask them to show you the documentation of any follow-up they have done for each respective lead. Depending on how they organize themselves, this might be by having them search their sent messages, by looking into the contact records if they use an automated lead tracking/CRM system, or if they use a manual system, then by looking into their folders, binders or paper trails to see what notes they have written on their print-outs.

Create your own "scorecard" to use as you review these details. Here are some criteria to consider for your checklist.

- **Timeliness of first response.** For electronic leads, did the salesperson respond same day or next? Did they reply only in the website tool or portal, or did they also respond directly in order to stand out from the others and to make sure a response was received? Did they also call when it was appropriate to do "Just to clarify a few details on what was needed"?
- For voice leads, was someone available to speak with the caller? If not, when did we call back?
- **Lead details.** When connections were made via phone, did the salesperson take copious notes showing that they fully investigated "the story" behind the group/function? Or if the inquiry came in electronically and did not have detailed information, did they respond with questions?
- **Timeliness of proposal/contract.** Did the salesperson respond with a proposal and/or contract within standard timeframe? (Typically 1 business day.) If they needed more time, did they let the prospect know that a response would be forthcoming?
- **Personalization of correspondence.** Was the correspondence personalized? (Such as did the correspondence include references to what was stated in the original voice or electronic inquiry? Example: "Since you mentioned that your group is looking for X, you will find that our hotel is excellent at providing Y.")
- **Confirmation of receipt.** Did the salesperson confirm and document receipt of the follow-up correspondence?
- **Reinforcement follow-up.** Did the salesperson follow-up after the proposal was received to express interest in securing the opportunity and to offer to work through any special needs or concerns?
- **Tenacity and method of follow-up.** Did they alternative between phone calls and emails? Did they follow-up at least three times unless they heard "no?"

- **Long-term follow-up.** If a sale was not secured, but the prospect could potentially generate future business, was the sales lead re-traced for an appropriate future follow-up action step?

By conducting a sales audit based on the criteria outlined here, you will ensure that your team is doing all it can to capture more than its fair share of group business by out-selling the competition at every step in the sales cycle.